

## Valley leaders consider ways to pay for public transit

---

**Cynthia Sewell**  
**Idaho Statesman**

The Idaho Statesman | Edition Date: 04-24-2006

Government and business leaders in the Treasure Valley are working on a new plan to fund public transportation at the local level because some federal funds will dry up in 2007.

The Coalition for Regional Transportation, a group of 40 Treasure Valley government and business leaders, wants the Idaho Legislature as well as Ada and Canyon county voters to approve a statewide local tax option to fund public transportation.

"We need to let the Legislature know we need help (funding public transportation) and that we want to help ourselves. We just need the authority to do so," Meridian Mayor Tammy de Weerd said.

Idaho is one of a few states that does not allow cities or counties to generate their own funding through a local option tax, such as sales or gasoline tax or a personal property tax or flat tax on vehicles.

The Coalition for Regional Transportation is a joint government and business effort formed last fall to find an alternative funding source for mass transit in Idaho, which now receives federal funding in addition to voluntary funds from participating cities and other agencies.

The Valley is losing its federal funding for transit operating costs because the Boise area has grown large enough to support its own transit system. Under current federal funding rules, Valley Regional Transit can use federal dollars to pay for half of its operating costs; a local match is needed for the other half.

Federal funding will drop to 25 percent on Oct. 1, and to zero on Oct. 1, 2007.

The coalition plans to introduce its legislation during the 2006-07 session. If its bill is approved, a local tax option referendum for Ada and Canyon counties could be put on the November 2008 ballot. If voters approve the referendum, tax collections would begin in 2009.

Coalition members are still working out the bill's details. For example, the proposed legislation could ask for a quarter-cent sales tax that would automatically expire in 20 years unless it is reauthorized by voter approval.

The earliest the new funding source for public transportation could kick in would be 2009.

The coalition will meet May 19 to finalize its proposal to put before the Legislature next year.



Idaho Statesman file photo

Want to try public transportation for free? ValleyRide is offering free bus rides all next month as part of May in Motion, an annual campaign to raise awareness about alternative transportation. For more information on ValleyRide services, visit [www.valleyride.org](http://www.valleyride.org).